



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, NEIGHBORHOODS, AND STRATEGIC PLANNING DEPARTMENT

## M E M O R A N D U M

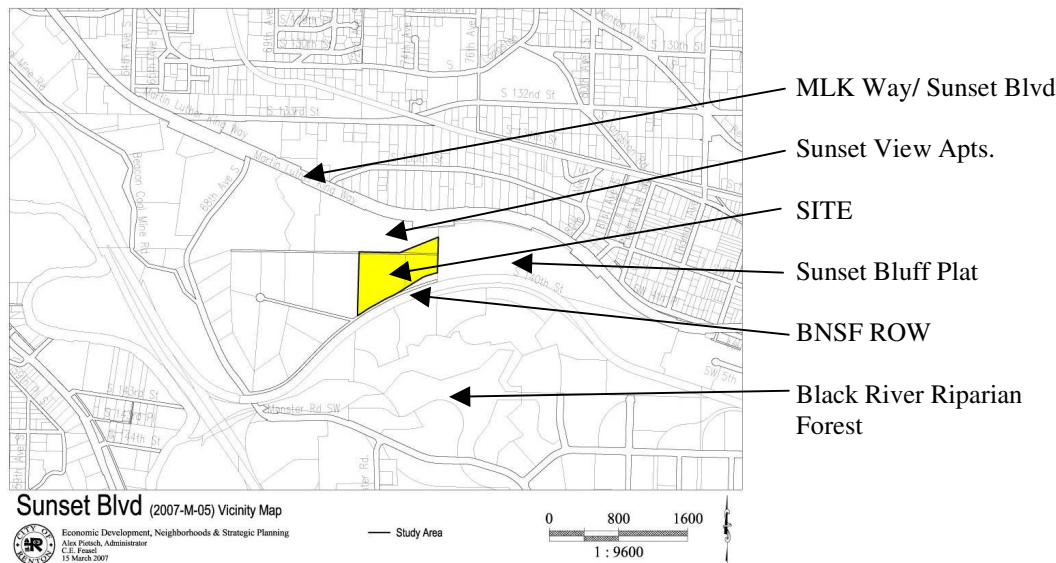
DATE: May 11, 2007

TO: Ray Giometti, Planning Commission Chair  
Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Erika Conkling, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: CPA 2007-M-05 Sunset Boulevard Rezone, part II

On March 21, 2007, the Planning Commission received a preliminary briefing on the QIP/Virtu application to rezone approximately 9.61 acres of property from a combination of Residential Multi-Family and Employment Area- Industrial land use designations (with Residential Multi-Family and Industrial-Heavy zoning) to Residential Medium Density land use (with Residential-10 units per net acre zoning). The site contains sensitive areas in the form of steep slopes and an “unclassified” landslide hazard. Currently the site is vacant, and used in part for the storage of a small amount of construction materials.



Surrounding the site are a variety of uses. Immediately north are the Sunset View Apartments, to the east is a platted single-family residential use, Sunset Bluff. West of the site is industrial property, with the nearest use a concrete recycling operation. South of the site is the Black River Riparian Forest, separated from the site by an active BNSF rail line. Home to many different wildlife species, the Riparian Forest provides habitat for a large colony of Great Blue Heron and a pair of Bald Eagles. Nesting areas for both species are more than 800 feet away from the proposed rezone site, and topographically separated by a 50 ft. high, very steep slope. A wildlife

assessment was included with this application and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife also provided comments in its letter to the City dated May 1, 2007.

Visiting this site was very interesting. The Virtu parcel is essentially a remnant from the development of the Sunset View Apartments. It is lightly wooded with a lot of scrubby vegetation, whereas the QIP parcel has been extensively graded. Topographically, the site is related to the Sunset Bluff site, and the two sites flow together. There is only a slight topographical difference between the QIP site and the Sunset View Apartments, but a large grade change between the site and the BNSF rail line and the Black River Riparian Forest. There is a graded hill, or berm, that separates the QIP site from the rest of the industrial property to the west. Despite the very active and loud activities of rock crushing, trucks, and heavy equipment at the materials recycling operation to the west, it could not be heard from the QIP/Virtu site. Freeway noise, from the nearby Martin Luther King Way on ramp to Interstate-5 was noticeable, but not any industrial noise, smells, or odors.

The applicants contend that residential development on the proposed site is a natural extension of the adjacent residential uses. They cite the demand for residential land, and several of the Comprehensive Plan's general policies related to growth and residential lands. Specifically, the request is for RMD designation and R-10 zoning. The purpose of the RMD designation is to *"...create the opportunity for neighborhoods that offer a variety of lot sizes, housing, and ownership options...."* Efficient use of urban services and infrastructure is also stressed, along with facilitating infill development and encouraging transit use. This is emphasized in Objective LU-GG, Objective LU-HH, Objective LU-II, and related policies.

Designation criteria for RMD falls under Objective LU-GG and its related policies. Policy LU-158 specifically addresses the criteria for R-10 zoning within the RMD designation:

- 1) *The area already has a mix of small-scale multi-family units or has had long standing zoning for flats or other low-density multi-family use;*
- 2) *Development patterns conducive to medium-density development are established*
- 3) *Vacant lots exist or parcels have redevelopment potential for medium-density infill development;*
- 4) *The project site is adjacent to major arterial(s) and public transit service is located within 1/4 mile;*
- 5) *The site can be buffered from existing single-family residential neighborhoods having densities of eight (8) dwelling units or less; or*
- 6) *The site can be buffered from adjacent or abutting incompatible uses.*

This site must meet at least three of these criteria. The site is vacant and it could be buffered from nearby incompatible uses, these two criteria are clearly met. Although there is no multi-family development within the RMD and proposed RMD areas, there are apartments abutting the site. Sunset Bluff's preliminary plat was approved for single-family development under R-10 standards including lot size and lot dimensions, but the net density calculation comes to only 3.1 units per acre. Topography and location of the QIP/Virtu site limit access, but residential development would take access through the Sunset Bluff development, which does have direct access to Sunset Boulevard/ Martin Luther King Way and the Metro transit lines that run along it. Any use on this site would be buffered by the hill/berm that separates it from the industrial

property to the west, and the steep slope to the south provides an effective barrier to the Riparian Forest.

Within the RMD designation, there are two possible zoning classifications: R-10 and R-14. There are five criteria that must be met for R-14 zoning: adjacent to an arterial, adjacent to the Urban Center, Highlands Center Village, or a Commercial Corridor, at least 20 acres in size, buffered from incompatible uses, and development densities with multiple unit types is achievable given constraints. Clearly, the QIP/Virtu Site does not meet the criteria for R-14 zoning within the RMD designation as it is not adjacent to one of the specified areas and is only nine acres in size.

Since the Virtu portion of the site is already in RMF land use, another possibility for residential designation is RMF. However, Comprehensive Plan Objective LU-JJ encourages new multi-family development as infill in existing RMF districts. Policy LU-183 specifically says that the RMF designation should not be expanded until all the land capacity in the designation is used. If the designation is to be extended, it must meet all of the following criteria: direct arterial access, with no access through a less intense land use, the property must abut an existing RMF district on at least two sides, and the designation should not bisect or truncate another land use district. The QIP site would take access through Sunset Bluff, a lower intensity land use and only abuts an existing RMF district on one side. Thus, RMF land use designation is not a good fit for this property.

If a residential use is desired for this property, there is also the possibility of Residential Single Family (RS) designation or Residential Low Density (RLD) designation. In the RLD land use designation, the purpose is to guide the development of constrained land and add larger-lot housing stock at urban densities. Although there are no policies for designating land RLD, there are policies for zoning land either Resource Conservation (RC) or R-1, or R-4 within the RLD designation. Objective LU-EE states that R-4 zoning is appropriate for suburban, estate-style residences at urban levels of development. Given the proximity to more intensely developed areas, including the Sunset View Apartments to the north and the future development in Sunset Bluff, this is not an ideal location for estate-style single-family housing.

The RS designation, with accompanying R-8 zoning, may be an appropriate designation for this property. The purpose of the RS land use designation is for quality, detached residential development and enhanced single family living environments. As the primary residential zoning district in the City, there are no designation criteria in the Comprehensive Plan for the RS designation. Since the applicant is interested in development of the site for single-family houses, the RS designation would work well. Policy LU-148 specifies a minimum lot size of 4,500 square feet for infill projects on properties at least one acre in size. This would allow for similar development as is planned for Sunset Bluff, which will have lots sizes in the range of 4,000-5,500 square feet. (However, many of the lots planned in Sunset Bluff are to be 40 feet wide under that site's R-10 zone while RS zoning of the subject site would require a minimum 50-foot width.)

However, it would be a mistake to assume that residential use is the best land use for this property without analysis of the industrial or commercial options. The property is currently in

EA-I (Employment Area- Industrial) designation and zoned I-H (Industrial- Heavy). Objective LU-XXX stresses the importance of the Employment Area designations to provide adequate land capacity for employment and business as the City grows. It is the purpose of the EA-I designation to hold that space for industrial and manufacturing uses. These policies are consistent with Economic Development Element Objective ED-C to sustain and expand the City's industrial base.

Evaluation of buildable lands data shows that the City has a very small supply of vacant and available industrial lands. There are only approximately 113 gross acres of vacant industrial land, which shrinks to just under 64 acres when adjusted to remove critical areas, rights-of-way, and other land dedicated for public purposes. Redevelopable industrial lands add another 58 gross acres, but only 26 net acres of land to this inventory. Thus, there are only about 90 acres of vacant and redevelopable industrially zoned lands in the City of Renton. The calculated net developable area of the QIP site is approximately 5.4 acres. Thus rezoning of the QIP site would result in the loss of about 6% of the vacant and redevelopable industrial land in the City of Renton, and the accompanying loss of future employment potential of approximately 127 jobs.

A land use designation that supported commercial or office uses may be one way to ensure space for future employment growth. However, review of amending the land use to a commercial or office land use designation is not appropriate. Access would be prohibited for such uses through the planned Sunset Bluff residential community. As a result, a road would need to be developed through the industrial area to the west. Realistically, the materials recycling and rock crushing business on a portion of this property would prevent the development of the QIP site for commercial or office use, and the development of a road to serve it. Right now, the market is not strong enough to support additional commercial or office development in such a hard to reach area. Commercial office use would only be realistic if a larger portion of the Industrially zoned property, between the QIP/ Virtu Site and Monster Road, was to be put into Commercial or Office use.

Clearly, this piece of land is very difficult to classify. While the layout of the land may be conducive to some type of residential land use, RMD or RS land use may be the most appropriate designation based on the type of use that the applicant is interested in. However, any rezone to a residential use will result in the loss of available industrial land and a reduction in future employment. Yet, the site itself makes the property difficult to develop for a business use. Planning Commission input is needed before staff issues a formal recommendation.